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Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol
Betsi Cadwaladr
University Health Board

Hergest Unit
Bangor
Wales LL57 2PW
December 11th 2019

Andrew Dillon
Chief Executive Officer
National Institute for Healthcare and Clinical Excellence

Re NICE Guidance

Dear Andrew Dillon

I recently sent versions of the attached letter to a number of Ministers/Departments of Health. Vaughan Gething suggested taking "my" concerns to you and to June Raine - attached. Mr Gething's Department may not understand MHRA's brief and so I am copying Dr Raine in here rather than writing separately.

The correspondence arose from a recent inquest at which I testified which returned a conclusion I regard as wrong and potentially compromising of the wider public health. This led to the attached letter to Michelle O'Neill MLA.

A key reason for this incorrect conclusion lay in the patient's GP and later hospital doctors testifying they did not believe the literature on antidepressants was ghostwritten and they were fully adherent to NICE guidelines. They also stated they had used drugs approved by MHRA, internationally recognised for their excellence in these matters – the implication seemingly being that if approved by MHRA these drugs could do little harm.

Full adherence to NICE Guidelines and using a drug approved by MHRA seems to have persuaded the coroner to override a conclusion that I'd expect most people exposed to the facts of the case would have adopted.

A group of good doctors in this case have been misled by misunderstandings about NICE. In 2004, a NICE group working on Guidelines for the treatment of paediatric depression, drew attention to this hazard in an editorial in the Lancet – Depressing Research.

I testified about this hazard a few weeks later to a House of Commons Select Committee and I have been doing so at regular intervals since under oath in court, in peer-reviewed articles, in books and lectures – for instance in a public lecture in the Welsh Senedd building a year ago – and in an open letter to David Haslam earlier this year and in recent letters.

I can see constraints on any response you might offer and it's not the job of NICE to police the academic literature. I will write to Mr Gething, telling him it's my job not yours to alert him to this risk. The public though will likely want someone to tackle it.

Yours sincerely

Professor David Healy MD FRCPsych
cc. J Raine, V Gething.